

Young Love Spoiler-Filled Review



Young Love is a mature animated comedy spun off from the short film, *Hair Love*, by Matthew A. Cherry, Everett Downing Jr., and Bruce W. Smith. Cherry, who created this series, began working in the entertainment industry in 2007. Downing created the Afrofuturist series [My Dad the Bounty Hunter](#). Smith created *The Proud Family* and [The Proud Family: Louder and Prouder](#). Sony Pictures Animation, Blue Key Entertainment, and Lion Forge Animation produced this series. This article was written during the 2023 SAG-AFTRA strike. Without the labor of actors currently on strike, *Young Love*, being reviewed here, wouldn't exist.

This series comes at a time that there are growing number of Black-centered animated series on streaming services, including [My Dad the Bounty Hunter](#), [The Proud Family: Louder and Prouder](#), [Craig of the Creek](#), [Supa Team 4](#), [Kizazi Moto: Generation Fire](#), *Central Park*, and [Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur](#). There are also ongoing indie animations, like *Guardian Instance*, *Diver: The Animated Series*, and *Silver Lin*, by Black animator Brandon Wright. In addition, [indie animations](#) such as *Defenders of Alodia*, *LimeLight*, and *Captain Zero* are [in development](#). *Iwájú*, *Dantai*, *Cookies & Milk*, *Tiana*, and *Iyanu: Child of Wonder* are five animated series set to premiere on streaming platforms in the future.

Young Love follows a tight-knit Black family trying to pursue their dreams. It goes beyond what is depicted in *Hair Love*. Only Angela Young (voiced by Issa Rae), spoke in that film. In this series, Rae reprises her role. Kid Cudi and Brooke Monroe Conaway join her. Cudi voices her partner, Stephen Love. Conaway voices her daughter, Zuri Michaela Young-Love. The first episode pulls you into their world, as does the animation style. Stephen is an aspiring music producer. Angela is a hair stylist. She enters her workplace, the salon, Sister Locs, two months after she left the hospital, but is out of practice.

The episode goes on from there, with Stephen and Angela showing support for their daughter at a school auction. Star (voiced by Tamar Braxton) and Angela's parents, Russell Young (voiced by Henry Lennix) and Gigi Young (voiced by Loretta Devine), are introduced. Stephen and Angela rent their apartment from Russell, who is often hounding Stephen to pay the rent. Stephen, Angela, and Zuri often have fun together, despite their challenges. However, there are tensions. Angela wants to complete her bucket list, which she put together before her chemotherapy. Zuri has dug tunnels through the apartment, so she moves through undetected. At other times, Stephen and Angela help Zuri with her school projects.

Through it all, comedy [is part](#) and parcel of [this series](#), mixed with occasional coarse language, suggestive dialogue, and violence. *Young Love* doesn't sugarcoat life in Chicago or tense family dynamics, but shows them realistically instead. At the same time, the series highlights the role of the sharing economy, sexist beliefs from men (claims of women's incapability), and gangs. The latter is manifested in Lil Ankh ([voiced](#) by Idrys). He is a rap/hip hop star and Stephen works for him. When it comes to the sharing economy, Angela convinces her fellow co-worker, Cheri, to use a digital app for booking appointments.

The series has a strong slice-of-life vibe, from the fight between Russell and a 1970s washing machine (he finally wins when he puts it at the curb), Zuri and Gigi going to apartments managed by Russell to collect rent (to prove women aren't incapable). At the same time, it provides commentary on social media influencers. In the fourth episode, for instance, Zuri becomes friends with Stacy, after she objects to the book selection by the school librarian, Ms. Green and feels guilt for her homelessness, resulting in her inviting Stacey and her family to stay in the Young's apartment.

This quickly goes wrong when Angela becomes a social media influencer and exploits the new residents, using them to gain followers. They strike back by mooching off her. Angela

and Zuri get their new occupants (Stacey and her family) to leave by getting them a hotel room. In the end, they do very well for themselves. Supporters gift them an entire house, while Zuri, Stephen, and Angela don't even have a whole house. In some ways, Angela and Zuri get what they deserve. Overall, the episode is critical of social media influencers and their negative influence. Crowdfunding's positives are hinted. This episode has a similar message to that communicated about such individuals in [*Karma's World*](#) and [*The Proud Family: Louder and Prouder*](#).

The value of art and the creative process is key theme in *Young Love*. For instance, in the fourth episode, Stephen connects with his nephew, Amir (voiced by Noah Cottrell), who likes to spray paint. He brings him to a modern art exhibit, exciting him. This goes further in the next episode, when Stephen puts aside his contract with Lil Ankh, after the latter rejects his beats, and tries to ink a deal with a White male advertising executive. He hopes that this will help him break free of Ankh.

The firm is steeped in White bro culture. It is racist but hidden behind niceties. The executive he met previously is joined by a few others. They all dress like Black people, claim they "get" them, and are "allies." While he cringes, he goes along with it because of the compensation. This episode criticizes "inclusive" corporate culture. In reality, the culture of this corporation is the "same old race shit." This gets worse when Stephen uncovers that he's making a racially tinged laundry detergent jingle.

What follows is a funny sequence: a Twitter bird chases Stephen and Star. They are confronted by historical Black figures who warn them against making the jingle. They ignore this, and make a subversive jingle, with Black power themes. The White ad execs don't know better. This is squashed when Lil Ankh releases a similar song, and they have to return the money. Even worse, Lil Ankh calls out Stephen as "trash" and a "traitor." It is no accident that in the same episode, Angela bonds with a new client, a Black woman named Jade, one of the only Black women who leads a PR firm. Zuri tries to sell cookies to "get back" at the Girl Scouts.



This series is more than a mix of slice-of-life and drama. The episodes often come with warnings for strong or coarse language, and occasional violence. Unlike other series, aimed at all ages, *Young Love* is aimed at mature adults. It doesn't whitewash anything. Take for example, the sixth episode, when Stephen tries to figure out who he is without Lil Ankh, who stole his beats without credit, and ends up in a bad funk. After he brings Zuri to school, his beat-up car breaks down. He gets four flat tires. It is almost a manifestation of 1998 hit by The Coup, "[Cars & Shoes](#)."

If that isn't bad enough, Ankh refuses to give him credit. Star continues working with Ankh despite him being a scumbag. With this defeat, he imagines everyone criticizing his work, and even fills out employment applications that Russell gave him. There is then a twist: Russell once was drummer for a funk band! He declares that he sees potential in Stephen, saying he believes in him and says music is Stephen's identity. This is just the inspiration he needs. It is not mistake that everyone learns a lesson by the end of the episode: Angela learns that she should stop meddling in people's lives as a life coach and Zuri stops trying to tell people's fortunes with a demonic cootie-catcher. The episode ends with Stephen teaching Zuri piano chords. Angela welcomes further bonding between Zuri and Stephen.

The next episode of *Young Love* is one of my favorites since it contains social commentary on pyramid schemes, video game addiction, and comedy (known as throwing shade

in this series). For the first of these topics, Angela tries to extract her mom from a pyramid scheme called Ruminare, to sell reported “holy water.” This changes when the devious speaker declares that a benefit is an “all-exclusive” trip to Paris. She then accepts it since a vacation to Paris is on her bucket list.

They end up hawking this to more people until they realize the obvious: it is a swindle. They get a ticket, but to Paris, Illinois, not Paris, France, infuriating them. Angela says that Chicago’s broken educational system was a cause for her poor choice. She thanks her mom for teaching her to believe in herself again. While Angela and her mom round up “the crew” (those they roped into the scheme) to take down Ruminare, no one believes their tall tale, which appears partially fabricated.

The commentary on video game addiction and comedy is more straightforward. Stephen becomes resolute and determined to beat *Hustle Quest*, a video game that his nephew Amir made. After several days, he is victorious. However, Zuri easily beats the game in a few minutes, surprising Stephen. The latter makes clear that becoming obsessed with something short-lived is a waste of time. It implies that people have different forms of obsession. Video game addiction is [listed](#) in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD). However, there isn’t a consensus on whether it is separate disorder or manifestation of other disorders.

When it comes to comedy, Zuri learns from Amir how to show “shade” on people. She stands up to Twan (voiced by Debra Wilson), who is calling people names. Both end up in the principal’s office. He chastises them for their behavior. The principal says that if they continue, they will become comedians who charge pennies for jokes. Zuri and Twan decide to team up and tell jokes together, and charge people for it.

The principal’s line may be a dig at comedians and how some will do anything to be funny, even if it takes others down. On the other hand, it might be more tongue-and-cheek, considering the comedy of *Young Love* itself. Consider the next episode. Zuri believes that her parents are having sex. Instead, they are trying to coordinate a schedule. Zuri’s initiation is somewhat right: after she leaves, they try to have sex. However, Stephen’s desire for chicken wins out, annoying Angela.

Of all the episodes, the eighth episode touches on the value of artwork, drug use in the Black community, the value of artwork, and “spicing up” romance. For the first of these topics, Amir bonds with Zuri. Amir honors his father by spray painting on a wall. Zuri unknowingly

helps him, as does a young Black man wearing a face mask. This empowering message about art fits with other episodes. In comparison, series such as [*The Proud Family: Louder and Prouder*](#) do not have similar messages.

On the second of the topics, Stephen and Angela try to find a place where they went early on in their relationship. However, the restaurant has disappeared, and they feel out of place in a now-gentrified neighborhood. Focusing on gentrification in *Young Love* is not unique. [*Kizazi Moto*](#), [*Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur*](#), [*City of Ghosts*](#), and [*Birdie Wing*](#) did the same. Stephen and Angela are skeptical about going into a shop, sitting where the restaurant they loved was located. They only enter to charge their phones. A White woman runs the store. She welcomes them, bowing, and welcomes them with “[namaste](#).” In some ways, she represents spiritualist White people.

This soon changes. Angela and Stephen drink their tea. It’s infused with THC, otherwise known as tetrahydrocannabinol. It’s the main psychoactive ingredient in cannabis. They remain high for the rest of the episode. This doesn’t stop them from giving zingers to White people. Angela calls gentrification “domestic imperialism” and describes a nearby White shop owner as a “[colonizer](#).” They find the food truck run by the chef who once ran their beloved restaurant. They are so high that Angela doesn’t discipline Zuri for leaving the house (she was supposed to stay put). Stephen just vibes while this happens.



Apart from [*The Freak Brothers*](#), an indie animated series which is absolute dreck, and [an allusion](#) in an episode of *Steven Universe Future*, I can't think of any other series which gives a positive portrayal of getting high. None of the other Black animated series I mentioned earlier even approach the topic of drug use at all. Executives would consider it "too mature" for all-ages series. Perhaps they think it could increase drug use since one study [suggested](#) popular music about cannabis could do. More likely, they have certain perceptions of children's wants, which don't always align with reality.

Otherwise, the final plot thread, of spicing up romance, takes place between Russell and Gigi. They give each other presents, but Gigi remains annoyed that each year repeats itself. Rain continues to stop Russell's plans to go out for their romantic anniversary. She demands they change things up and Russell ends up delivering. He returns in the uniform of a letter carrier (his former job). The message this communicates is that love is possible between anyone, no matter their age. It fits with the rest of the series, in which Russell, Gigi, Angela, Stephen, and Zuri live in the same building. In fact, Stephen, Zuri, and Angela live above Gigi and Russell, and have a cat named Rocky, who is a character in some ways, but never speaks.

Later episodes involve Stephen and Angela either helping their daughter, Zuri, or trying to bond with others. The latter is on display when Amir goes with Stephen to buy expensive sneakers, which cost \$300.00. Angela begins to come into her own, as she runs the salon, known as Sister Locs, and realizes that she can't be the "cool" boss, but needs firm instead. Stephen tries to compose some beats and realizes he shouldn't be like Lil Ankh, but should chart his own path. When it comes to helping Zuri, her parents get her out of a situation where she caused students to riot over coffee cake, after she thought she was [Angela Davis](#).

These episodes set the stage for the final two episodes of *Young Love*. In the first of these episodes, Angela's parents (and Zuri's grandparents by extension) demand that Zuri come to church after she complains that God is ignoring her prayers. They are horrified after Stephen calls out religion as corrupt and Angela says spirituality is what is best for Zuri. Going to church is uncomfortable for Stephen and Angela. In the process, Angela lies. She claims she's married to Stephen. At the same time, the episode shows how certain people can be charlatans. Zuri poses as the "chosen one" so she can one-up her friend, Sky. She even tries to take away the Star student idea when Sky begins questioning her.

In this series, God is a Black man. He is remarkably busy and claims to not have time to involve himself in people's affairs. He is similar to the God, with a light bulb as a head, [in *Disenchantment*](#), voiced by Phil LaMarr, a well-known Black male voice actor. The episode has an interesting twist. It turns out that the financial advisor who helped Angela and Stephen get their finances in order, and deal with their overdue payments, was God himself. In addition, the Principal's worry about lawsuits (when Zuri claims she is the chosen one) and separation of church and state is timely, since some [sneer](#) at legal prohibition of religious involvement in public schools, in the U.S., and desire the re-introduction of (Christian) prayer.

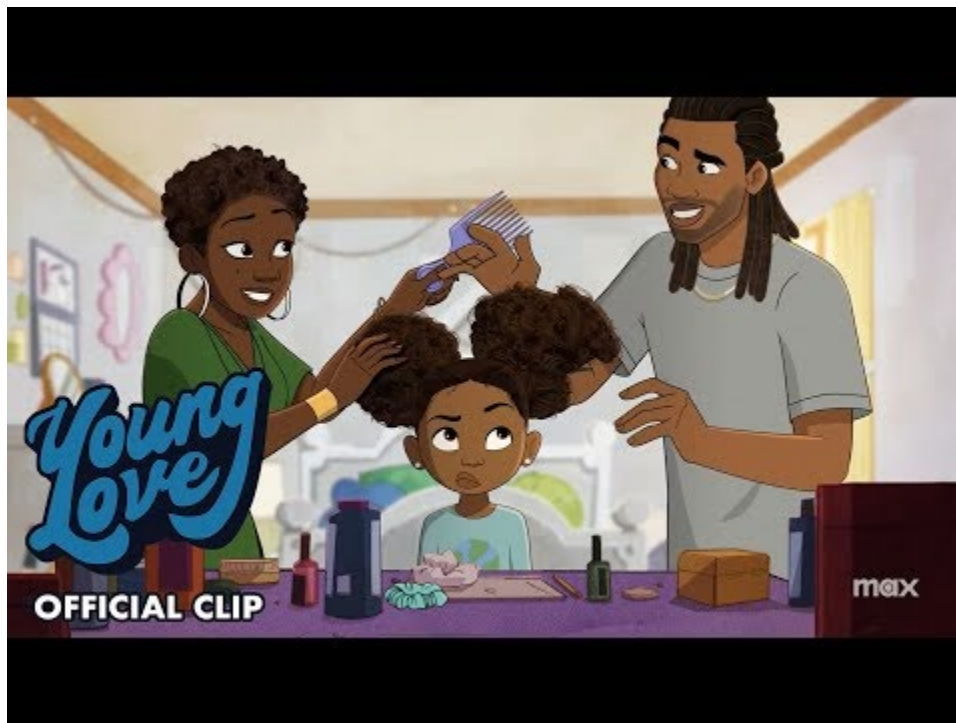
This nuanced approach to religion in *Young Love*, ending with Angela's parents remaining religious, while Angela, Zuri, and Stephen are spiritualists, is unique. It differs from lip service the Simpsons family shows to churchgoing in *The Simpsons*, or lack of religious worship in *The Proud Family*, and its reboot. This nuance reflects the fact that [only 16%](#) of Americans committed to attending religious services in person. A [2021 survey](#) is even more pertinent. One-in-five Black Americans told survey takers they are religiously unaffiliated. Instead, they identify as agnostic, atheist, or "nothing in particular." This is especially the case among Gen Z and Millennials. In addition, a recent survey attested that over 10% of Asian Americans [are non-religious](#).

The *Young Love* series finale builds upon the penultimate episode. It begins with Zuri's declaration that she will marry her classmate, BJ. This goes awry when he swallows a strawberry with a ring inside. Following this, Zuri, and Angela's parents, pressure Stephen and Angela to get married. At first, neither wants this. They laud their freedom from "binding chains of matrimony." Both describe themselves, to the school principal, as loving parents committed to providing Zuri with a stable home. Non-marriage between Angela and Stephen remained in part because of Stephen's repeated failures to propose marriage.

Russell's claim that no weddings or marriages will cause an apocalypse impacts this decision. [A recent poll](#) is relevant: Americans expressed worries about declining marriages. Even so, Catholics and historically Black Protestants, especially, had less concern about those with fewer children. That poll also noted that larger groups took a neutral view. They believed that the declining number of marriages is neither positive nor negative for society. At the same time, many women said, in [a related poll](#), of Americans that they took the traditional, and patriarchal route, by taking their husband's surname in opposite-sex marriages.

As such, Russell's view is unhinged. Society has existed, and will continue to exist, without marriage. There is [public support](#) among Americans for a nuclear family, even though few see parenthood or marriage as "central to living a fulfilling life." Russell's response is akin to the "No on Infinity" ad in the *Futurama* "[Proposition Infinity](#)" episode. That ad satirizes people against same-sex marriage. Russell's fear combines with Angela's fear that she will become a 1950s-style housewife, a path she thinks Zuri will follow. At the same time, Stephen fears Angela will leave him, causing him to live alone in a house in 1980s-style situation.

The episode ends with both eschewing the idea of marriage, after Angela says they are going too fast, Stephen remains unsure, and Angela's therapist says she should not put everyone else's needs before her own. Gigi stops Zuri's brainless child bride marriage proposal to BJ. Stephen and Angela agree to have a very long romantic engagement instead of marriage, saying that love is holding their little family together. Even so, there is a marriage between Gigi and Russell. It is a re-marriage, a re-stating of commitment between them. The wedding goes on its head, after they play a song Stephen produced and begin throwing cake at each other. Overall, this episode is a clever way to end *Young Love*. It makes clear that love isn't only possible through marriage.



In this way, it makes a different point that [Spy x Family](#), with Loid and Yor's marriage of convenience, made without either being in love with one another, at first. The views of Angela

and Stephen on marriage align with criticism of the marriage institution, even of same-sex marriage. Critics argue that marriage [perpetuates](#) a system which makes married people “more worthy of...health care and economic rights” than others. Such critics include Michael Warner (in his book [The Trouble with Normal](#)), Kate Millett, Shulamith Firestone, Simone de Beauvoir, Eleanor Leacock, Clare Chambers, and Dean Spade.

Obviously, *Young Love* is not some political manifesto extolling how marriage is not the be-all, end-all for love. But it is a breath of fresh air from the many series out there, either directly (*Tangled*) or indirectly stating that marriage is the only way to ensure that love can be long-lasting. There can still be romantic friendships and romances without any legally binding life-long commitments. Unfortunately, popular culture depictions of those friendships or romances are rare. Instead, shows fit with the societal expectation of marriage and the idea that unmarried/single people are abhorrent, bizarre, or “suspicious.” This mentality has [seeped](#) into online communities of fans who [enjoy yuri](#) or [yaoi](#). Such fans believe that two or more characters in love need to marry.

The fact that *Young Love* grew from [a short film](#) named *Hair Love*, which is less than seven minutes long, is phenomenal. *Hair Love* features a young Black girl awoken by a cat, trying out a new hair style, and following a video of her mother, who has an easy-to-use hair tutorial. In *Hair Love*, neither she, nor her dad, who tries to help her with her hair, which he fights, akin to what Moon Girl/Lunella [in Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur](#) did, speaks. Her mother has the only speaking role.

Young Love wasn’t crowdfunded like *Hair Love*. However, the same company produced it: Lion Forge Animation, along with other companies. That [animation studio](#), a division of Lion Forge Entertainment, is known for *Drawn In*, *Rhymes Through the Times*, *The Park Bench*; and *Rise Up, Sing Out*. In addition, the studio announced work on a film ([Heiress](#)) and TV series ([Iyanu: Child of Wonder](#) and [Hero’s Journey the Series](#)).

As I mentioned in [my last review](#), Max screwed over this series by posting four episodes a week. This made the series almost impossible to keep up with. It ensured that not even one Wikipedian would create a page for the series. Instead, the series is only [a redirect](#) on the *Hair Love* page. This is unfortunate, since social media chatter on X/Twitter is generally positive, except for a few people using clips out of context to bash the show. Users call it cute, slick, cool,

hilarious, hip, perfect, and heartwarming. On other social media platforms, and among critics, the reception appears to be positive.

Issa Rae, Kid Cudi, Brooke Monroe Conaway, Tamar Braxton, Henry Lennix, Loretta Devine, Idrys, Debra Wilson, and Noah Cottrell, [voice actors](#) for this series, bring their talent to the table. Mara Junot (as Cynthia Love), Mike Smith (as Dwayne), and many others, join them. Their experience allows the series to [tackle topics](#) like bullying, masculinity, gender roles, marketing, racial justice, exploitation of Black culture with ease. Even so, not everything gets equal emotional weight.

Rae is new to voice acting, apart from voicing the mother in *Hair Love* and Jessica Drew in *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*. Similarly, Cudi voiced Jabari in *Enter Galactic* and Clay in *Trolls Band Together*. Junot recently voiced Beta [in My Dad the Bounty Hunter](#). Devine has voiced many characters, as have Lennix and Smith. Wilson recently voiced Amanda Waller in [My Adventures with Superman](#), Terra Snapdragon in [The Owl House](#), Quinn's mother [in Final Space](#), and Z'oto in *Star Trek: Lower Decks*. In contrast, this series is the first voice role for Conaway, Cottrell, and Braxton.

I hope that this series gets a second season. It would give new/newish screenwriters like Brian Ashburn, Breannah Gibson, R. Malcolm Jones, Kelsey Barry, Jackson DeLoach, Juston Gordon-Montgomery, Guillermo Martinez, story writer Jeanine Daniels, executive story editor Keisha Zollar, and seasoned writers such as Willie Hunter, [Carl Jones](#), Randa Sheppard, and Dayna Lynne North, a chance to shine again. Knowing how turbulent the animation industry, in the U.S., is right now, and how the executives are stonewalling SAG-AFTRA (resulting in a continued actor's strike), I am doubting it will happen.

Young Love is currently streaming on Max.

Animation	★★★★★
Voice Acting	★★★★★
Story	★★★★★
Music	★★★★★
<div>5</div> <div>★★★★★</div>	